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Issues

for
RHODE ISLAND
MANAGEMENT

Published by The Rhode Island Office of Personnel Administration

September 1987

DE-STRESSING THE WORKPLACE

Everyone suffers from stress periodically. How and when individuals experience stress can vary, but there seems to be a common place where most people experience stress — at work. The prevalence of deadlines, computer errors, long meetings, and budgetary concerns may cause stress levels to rise daily.

Whether addressing problems at work or elsewhere, many authors of stress studies divide symptoms and causes of stress into two categories, male and female, as did Georgia Witkin-Lanoil, Ph.D., in her books *The Female Stress Syndrome* and *The Male Stress Syndrome*.

In short, Witkin-Lanoil claims that the way men and women are raised, their cultural reinforcements, behavior models, psychologies and peer and parent pressure have significant impact on their response to situations.

For instance, most women who have attained success in their careers, have had to transgress classic roles of dependency. They have had to be assertive, independent, autonomous and decisive.

Dr. Harriet B. Braiker, in her article, "The stress of success," (*Working Woman*, August 1986) contends that many female high achievers in the workplace are haunted by a memory of that other woman — a mother, a sister, an earlier self — and that causes a special kind of stress.

A desire to combat undesirable weaknesses by being strong may keep some women from expressing needs for nurture and support from others. Braiker labels the condition the Type E stress cycle, or the "everything to everyone" mindset.

While the Type E cycle may contribute heavily to stress in working women, men typically have other causes of stress.

Both men and women want to have control, yet according to Ms. Witkin-Lanoil's article, "What's Wrong with Him," (*Health*, June 1986), men interpret a greater number of situations as "control" situations. Men become anxious when they have to wait for a table at a restaurant, get caught in a traffic jam or find themselves in situations with uncertain outcomes.

While situations that trigger stress for men and women may vary, the effects of stress are similar for both sexes. Stress can interfere with job performance as well as interpersonal



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
EXECUTIVE CHAMBER, PROVIDENCE

Edward D. DiPrete
Governor

Dear State Employee:

As you know, the recently adjourned 1987 General Assembly session achieved an unparalleled level of success. Due to a tremendous spirit of bipartisan cooperation, many pieces of very important legislation were passed and signed into law that are of particular importance to you and your co-workers.

One of these bills is House Bill 5336. This bill requires that guidelines be established by the Department of Administration to provide for various alternative and nontraditional work schedules for state employees on a volunteer basis. The development of alternate work plans has always been a very important issue to the many Rhode Islanders who are employed in state service. Now, because of this law, by January 1988, many of you will be able to consider part-time, flex-time and job-sharing as definite options.

In addition, through the passage of several pieces of legislation and budget appropriations, we have dramatically increased the amount of state funding going towards alleviating the current shortage of day care services available to our working families.

All of these initiatives are extremely important to all the workers of Rhode Island. As Governor, it is a pleasure to be able to share some of state government's successes with the people who help our state run so smoothly and efficiently.

Sincerely,

Edward D. DiPrete
Governor

relationships. It's also the cause of a variety of health problems ranging from headaches to heart attacks.

In "Why It's So Hard to Get Any Work Done and What you Can Do About It," (*Working Woman*, Aug. 1986), Robin Warshaw sites several examples of how to reduce stress at work — for both men and women.

One of the most effective ways you can lower stress levels is to be organized. A course in time management can help. If you learn to control predictable situations during the day, you will have more time and energy to deal with those that come up unexpectedly.

Dividing your workday into segments for creative projects, returning phone calls, meetings and visitors is a good start. It's

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De-Stress in the Workplace (Continued from page 1)

best if you can avoid being interrupted from your self-designed schedule, but naturally you will have drop-in visitors, unexpected phone calls and crisis situations that have to be attended to. Even so, Warshaw gives several suggestions that can keep you on track.

When possible, have your staff answer phone calls and either refer callers to other appropriate people or, if only temporarily, handle the situation themselves. Managers who answer every call may be responsible people, but they also tend to get behind.

Robin Warshaw also points out that you can save time on the phone by returning calls during the last hour of the day when people are finishing the day's work and don't want to linger on the phone.

In addition, Warshaw suggests a control exercise. If you have a visitor who frequently extends business discussions into long discourses on personal or other unrelated topics, have the next discussion in his or her office so you can leave when you want to.

Why is it Some Things that Make Me Crazy Don't Affect Others the Same Way?

It's eye-opening to note that some circumstances you find annoying seem to hardly promote a moment's worry in others. What that suggests is that how you perceive a situation, and not the actual circumstances, alters your feelings about it.

One stress management program conditions people to adjust the way they interpret things. For instance, if the sound of a ringing phone makes you tense, the program teaches you to respond to the ringing noise as a rhythmic sound.

If you're not ready for that advanced a level of control, don't despair, there are other methods of calming down you can learn to incorporate between stressful events.

Beginning to Relax

The next time you're frustrated, sit in your chair and just close your eyes. Release the tension from each part of your body starting with the toes and working your way up through your legs, torso, arms, neck and head. Some people find it easier to relax if they first tighten a part of their body and then let go of the tension. To relax your entire body this way only takes a few minutes and can be extremely revitalizing.

By taking your mind off work when you leave the office, you can shake off tensions and return to work the next day feeling calmer.

Participating in a form of exercise that suits your team-player or self-motivated disposition is a vital way to cope with stress.

So is enjoying a soothing environment such as a bath, listening to music while lying down on a couch, seeing a movie, fishing at a favorite fishing hole or engaging in other quiet activities to take your mind off problems.

Finally, good old fashioned play — like you did as a kid — can help. If you have kids, play with them. Or concentrate on a board game with a friend or family member.

Probably the best way to introduce anti-stress measures into your life, is to allow them to fit your schedule. Rather than creating another burden by telling yourself you've got to squeeze in one more thing, just enjoy your new opportunity to relax.

HONING YOUR INTUITIVE SKILLS

It was an intuitive flash of insight that led Albert Einstein to the theory of relativity.

A gut feeling gave Revlon CEO Charles Revson the insight to consistently pick product winners.

What is intuition and why is it so useful for managers? The dictionary defines it as the power or faculty to attain knowledge without evident rational thought or inference. "Intuition involves both factual analysis and the combination of deductive and inductive reasoning skills," says Dr. Weston H. Agor, professor of organizational management at the University of Texas. "A good deal of what intuition is about is integrating facts and feelings so you can make the right decision," explains Agor. "Gathering facts and numbers is not going to get you too far; at the same time going exclusively on a whim won't do it either. Integrate them both, however, and you stand a good chance of achieving something."

By studying the decision-making skills of top executives, Agor learned that intuitive abilities are particularly important for managers because:

- **Facts are often limited.** — Managers frequently have to make decisions when they have only 50% of the information, he says. "Waiting for that additional 50 percent could mean a loss of market to a competitor."
- **There are usually many variables in the decision-making process.** — *Timing is important.*

You can hone your intuitive powers by:

- **Knowing your strong points.** Successful managers in major companies who rely on their intuition have a strong sense of what they can and cannot do. They are able to break down their jobs into components (organizing projects, delegating authority, brainstorming ideas, analyzing data) and know which tasks to undertake themselves and which ones to delegate. Try to get in touch with what's driving and motivating you. If you are unsure about your strengths and weaknesses, Agor recommends assessment testing.
- **Keeping an intuition journal.** — A good way to track yourself is to write down your intuitive experiences soon after they occur. Keep your journal with you at all times. When you go to bed, make sure it's within reach. If you wake up in the middle of the night with a brilliant flash or have an insightful dream, jot it down immediately. If you wait until morning to record it, chances are you'll forget all or parts of it. "Typically, people get some of their best ideas during the night while resting or dreaming," says Agor.
- **Reading extensively.** — Don't confine yourself to one type of reading. Your intuitive skills improve significantly as you broaden your consciousness. Open yourself to a variety of ideas and concepts.
- **Try relaxation exercises.** — Relaxation clears and soothes your mind. Find a compatible technique. For some it's solitude, meditating, reading or listening to music. For others, it's biking, swimming, jogging or playing tennis.

Most of all remember this: you are not born with intuitive skills. They are developed and refined by hard work and concentration. Don't be impatient. In time, intuition can play a more important role in both your business and personal life.

COMMUNICATIONS: AN ESSENTIAL TOOL OF MANAGEMENT

Part V in a continuing series for public service managers on effectively communicating with employees.

Synopsis of Part IV — (*Issues* — February, 1987)

In Part IV the role of employees and unions in the communication process was examined; and some reasons were offered on why communication efforts sometimes fail.

Formulating communication policies — Sound communications policy seeks to keep employees as fully and frankly informed as possible, within the limitations of the agency's best interests. The following point up a number of important questions that you will want to consider in formulating "what to say" guidelines for managers as well as members of your staff. Once policy has been established, it should always be put into written form, and made readily available to anyone who prepares communications material.

What do employees want to know? — To the officer who must be constantly informed on all aspects of agency operations, it may come as a surprise that most rank-and-file employees *aren't really interested* in learning every detail about their agency. Instead, the average employee views his place of work much as he views his community, or a club or organization that he joins: they want to know what it can offer them personally, and what they must do to reap these benefits.

Generally, information of this nature falls into one of several categories:

- **Job security** — facts on the agency's stability, plans for future growth, intention to expand or reduce the workforce, commitment to fair treatment of employees.
- **Opportunity for advancement** — facts on how employees can get ahead, increase their income, improve their working conditions.
- **Status and recognition** — facts on why the employee's job is important; how the "team" rates with the public; how the employees themselves have contributed to its success.
- **Personal benefits** — facts on the material advantages of working for your government agency; how its job benefits compare to other plans in government and private industry.
- **What's expected in return** — facts on job performance criteria; procedures, policies and rules; standards of conduct; expected level of effort, contribution and cooperation.

Do your employees want more? An opinion survey can help you determine what other types of facts and figures might be of particular interest to your workforce. Records of griev-

ances and complaints are often useful tip-offs to information needs, as well.

What does management want to talk about? — Modest as employee's information wants may seem, there are many points where they can come into direct conflict with your agency's best interests. Even though it may be inadvisable to *disclose* certain aspects of operations and plans to employees, it is always safe to discuss plans or data that have already been released to the public.

Important point to remember: If your agency has had to announce publicly adverse conditions or serious setbacks, you will not be able to hide these events from employees. They'll respect management more — and will rally to its support — if given a straightforward, factual explanation.

Communicating to boost efficiency. — Good communications are without a doubt the keynote of good management-employee relations. But higher morale and a happier workforce aren't the only reasons why it pays to keep your employees informed. In every organization, effective communication methods can help to get essential work done quickly, easily and economically.

Setting communications objectives. — Practical application of information concepts — like the practical application of any other theory — calls for definite objectives and goals. You cannot hope to gauge the effectiveness of your communications systems or methods simply by deciding, for example, that you want them to inform employees about benefits. Instead, you must set specific, *quantitative* criteria: "a 50% reduction in employees' questions about benefits," "a 20% reduction in grievances," "elimination of lost-time accidents," and the like.

If, at the end of a specific period, your communications have failed to meet these expectations, you'll want to look for:

- Possible "blocking" or other problems.
- Better ways to relate your message to employees' interests and needs.
- More effective communications media.

Attracting new employees. — Recruiting the manpower needed to get the work out is of vital concern to every organization. And whether *your* agency's jobs get filled quickly or go begging depends to a larger extent on how well you communicate with your labor market. Two guiding principles for successful recruiting messages:

- **Choose a medium that will reach the audience you want.** Different newspapers, magazines, and radio or TV stations attract different segments of the population and different occupational groups. Ask for audience survey figures from several media before choosing the best ones for your ads.
- **Design your message to interest a specific person — for the jobs you're trying to fill.** — Don't expect to recruit both unskilled workers and college grads with the same ad. Single out — perhaps with the help of an employee opinion survey — the job benefits that are most important at each education level, within each occupation or career, and within each age group. Have your personnel department and recruiters focus on these benefits in advertising or talking up the job.

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ISSUES

ISSUES is published four times a year by the Office of Personnel Administration, Division of Human Resources, Department of Administration, 289 Promenade Street, Providence, R.I. 02908

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W-4 FILING PENALTY CLARIFIED

Employee withholding errors will not result in penalties for individuals who make honest mistakes in calculating their wage withholding allowances, the Internal Revenue Service has recently announced.

The new W-4 Form specifies that a \$500 penalty will be imposed on taxpayers who claim an incorrect number of allowances, thereby reducing the proper amount of withholding from their wages. IRS stresses, however, that such penalties will be assessed only against taxpayers who deliberately and knowingly file a false W-4, not to those who make a mistake — e.g. claim six withholding allowances, rather than five or seven. Under no circumstances would a taxpayer be penalized for claiming too few allowances.

IRS also offers the following advice to employers on how to withhold for workers who fail to file a new W-4 form by the October 1, 1987, deadline:

- Make no change in the withholding of single workers who claim one or zero allowances on their old forms, or for married persons who claimed zero or have been withheld at higher single rate.
- Withhold as if one allowance had been claimed for single employees who previously claimed more than one allowance, and as if two allowances had been claimed for married persons who claimed more than two.

Communications (Continued from page 3)

Many public-sector employers are currently revamping their recruiting messages for young college grads. Terms like "security," "success" and "good pay" are going out the window, being replaced by "imagination" and "creativity" in addition to opportunities for public service.

Next time in ISSUES, Part VI of Communications — preparing the new employee for his/her job; communicating policies and rules; publicizing employee benefits; and correcting misinformation and dispelling rumors.

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Deferred Compensation — an employee benefit with far-reaching advantages . . .

State employees can save for the future by participating in the deferred compensation program, a way of putting money aside without having to pay taxes on it, or the income it earns, until retirement when your tax rate is usually lower. Managers can assist their employees in learning more about deferred compensation by showing them an audio-visual presentation that clearly explains the deferred compensation program. To arrange to show this slide-tape production, call the Employee Benefits Section, Office of Personnel Administration at 277-3160.

This newsletter is sponsored by the state's three carriers of the deferred compensation plan.



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DEPARTMENT OF LABOR ISSUES FINAL REGULATIONS ON FLSA WAGE EXEMPTIONS

The federal Labor Department has published final regulations incorporating amendments to the Fair Labor Standards Act's minimum wage and overtime exemptions for purposes of the statute's recordkeeping requirements.

The revised regulations, published in the July 1 *Federal Register*, are intended to conform employers' recordkeeping requirements to various amendments repealing, revising, or adding to the Act's exemptions for certain categories of employees. In addition to updating the statute's regulations, the revisions streamline recordkeeping requirements for all employers covered under the Act, but particularly those whose employees are subject to specific statutory exemptions.

Recordkeeping Requirements Clarified

The revisions do not incorporate the most recent amendments to FLSA governing application of the statute to employees of state and local governments, but do clarify recordkeeping requirements with respect to the partial overtime exemption for state and local government police and firefighters. Final regulations implementing the amendments applying FLSA to public employees were issued last January 5 ERW 121 in the January 26, 1987 issue of the *Federal Register*.

The final regulations decrease the recordkeeping requirements with respect to the numerous categories of employees that remain subject to specific statutory exemptions. The regulations apply to the approximately 4.2 million employers covered by FLSA and to around 83,000 state and local government agencies.

A profession is a personal thing that man acquires. It cannot be inherited. It cannot be bequeathed. Only he who, having made the acquisition, puts to use that knowledge and skill with all his ability and complete dedication of purpose can be truly called a professional.

— R.E. Onstad